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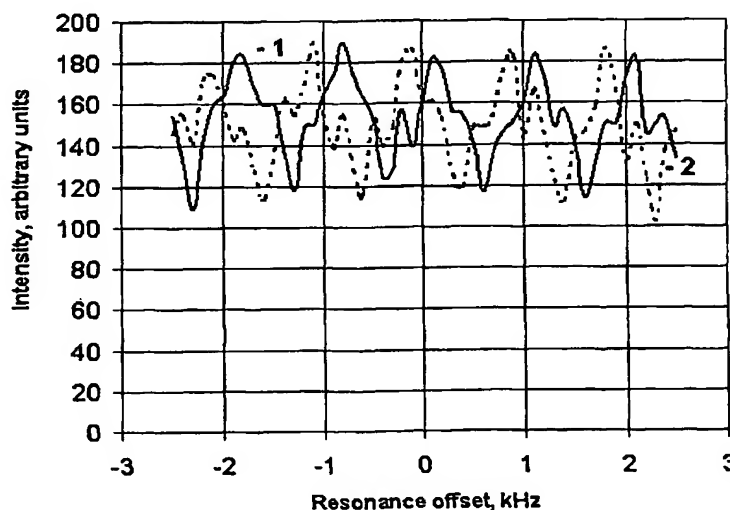
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(54) Title: PULSE SEQUENCES FOR EXCITING NUCLEAR QUADRUPOLE RESONANCE



(57) Abstract: An apparatus and a method for producing a multi-pulse sequence for irradiating a substance provided with quadrupole nuclei with either integer or half-integer spins to detect an NQR signal emitted therefrom. The apparatus has pulse sequence generating means adapted to produce a combination of two or more pulse sequences, arranged so that a definite regularity of the phase alteration of pulses in each of the pulse sequences occurs that is equivalent to a shift of spectral components of the pulse sequences in relation to each other. Furthermore, in at least one of the pulse sequences, there are not less than two phases alternating. A preparatory pulse may be included in one of the pulse sequences to reduce the effect of temperature, increase the intensity of the NQR signal and simultaneously eliminate intensity anomalies. Alternatively, the combination of pulse sequences may be different from a combination of PAPS and NPAPS, and none of the pulse sequences contain a preparatory pulse.

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"Pulse Sequences For Exciting Nuclear Quadrupole Resonance"

Field of the Invention

5 The present invention relates to the practical use of the nuclear quadrupole resonance (NQR) phenomenon for identifying substances that contain quadrupole nuclei with either integer or half-integer spins, particularly for identifying explosive or narcotic substances.

The invention has particular utility in multi-pulse radio frequency (RF) excitation of quadrupole nuclei and to the subsequent measurement of the NQR signal emitted
10 therefrom where the effect of temperature upon the measurement is mitigated.

Throughout the specification, unless the context requires otherwise, the word "comprise" or variations such as "comprises" or "comprising", will be understood to imply the inclusion of a stated integer or group of integers but not the exclusion of any other integer or group of integers.

15 The term "preparatory pulse" means both a separate preparatory pulse and a group of preparatory pulses.

The term "a group of preparatory pulses" means a group of pulses that precede a multi-pulse sequence distributed within time interval $\leq 3T_{1\rho}$ ($T_{1\rho}$ being the time of spin-lattice relaxation in a rotating coordinate system), during which the NQR
20 signal, as a rule, is not measured.

The term "the body of the sequence" is used to signify a multi-pulse sequence with subtracted preparatory pulses; the measurement of an NQR signal usually occurring when the "body of the sequence" is in action.

Background Art

The following discussion of the background art is intended to facilitate an understanding of the present invention only. It should be appreciated that the discussion is not an acknowledgement or admission that any of the material referred to is or was part of the common general knowledge as at the priority date of the application.

For the purposes of pulsed NQR, any solid sample containing quadrupole nuclei can be characterised by three parameters: the spin-lattice relaxation time T_1 , the spin-spin relaxation time T_2 and the time of the induction signal damping T_2^* .

- 10 From the point of view of practical use in NQR, and on the basis of the above parameters, multi-pulse sequences can be classified into the following general groups:

Group I:

Sequences of single pulses, which can include multi-pulse sequences of any type, if intervals between the pulses in these sequences exceed the spin-lattice relaxation time T_1 .

Group II:

Sequences with intervals between pulses τ that are within the limits $T_2^* < \tau < T_1$. All echo-sequences (sequences composed of a certain number of pulses which are organised in such a way that the NQR signal is formed not directly after the radio frequency irradiation pulse, but after a certain delay, necessary for refocussing the magnetic momentum of the sample nuclei) could also be regarded as belonging to this type of sequence, because for the optimal formation of the echo signal the condition $T_2^* < \tau < T_2$ should hold true. One of the main peculiarities of this type of sequence is its capability to saturate the quadrupolar spin system of the sample. This can be observed when a multi-pulse sequence of

this type is used, as the chain of NQR signals measured in the observation windows between the pulses decays with a time constant T_{1e} , which is called the effective relaxation time and lies within the limits of $T_2 \leq T_{1e} < T_1$ (or, to be more precise, within the limits of $T_2 \leq T_{1e} < T_{1\rho}$, where $T_{1\rho}$ is the relaxation time in rotating frame, with the permanent condition of $T_{1\rho} < T_1$).

Group III:

Stochastic sequences.

Group IV:

Multi-pulse sequences of the Steady State Free Precession (SSFP) type. Intervals between pulses in these sequences (τ) fulfil the condition of $\tau < T_2^*$. This type can include quite complex formations, containing not only SSFP sequences but also special techniques for destroying the SSFP state; this "destruction" can be achieved by including the magnetic field gradient pulses, by using composite pulses, by forming a special phase alternation of the RF carrier frequency, etc.

The purpose of this "destruction" is to overcome one of the main drawbacks of SSFP sequences - intensity anomalies, which manifest themselves by the decreasing amplitude and the increasing rate of signal decay when the parameters of an irradiating sequence approach resonance conditions

$$n \cdot \omega_{\text{eff}} = m \cdot \frac{\pi}{\tau}, \text{ where } \tau \text{ is the interval between pulses of the sequence, } n \text{ and } m$$

are whole numbers, an effective field ω_{eff} substitutes the effect of the RF pulses and the resonance offset

Group V:

Complex types of multi-pulse sequences containing sub-sequences of two or more of the above types of multi-pulse sequences.

The fifth group does not have any individual physical characteristics that do not relate to at least one of the previous groups. Therefore, only aspects of the first four groups of sequences in the above classification will be considered further.

Group I

5 Advantages:

1. No intensity anomalies;
2. No saturation problem, and therefore no signal decay.

Disadvantages:

1. At long T_1 times the detection time of a sample can exceed any practically
10 acceptable limits;
2. Single pulses can only create a free induction decay (FID) signal, entirely determined - as well as magneto-acoustic ringing, piezo-electric effects and the spurious signals of the resonance circuit of the NQR detector probe - by the pulse that generated it. The consequence of this is that the NQR signal
15 measured when the standard means of damping spurious signals is used, is considerably weakened, and often disappears completely.

Because of these disadvantages the first group of sequences is of little benefit for practical use in NQR.

Group II

20 Advantages:

1. Possibility of generating echo-signals with parameters depending not only on the last pulse but also on the preceding pulses of the sequence which can be used to cancel spurious signals while keeping and sometimes even increasing the intensity of the NQR signal;

2. Possibility of generating echo-signals at times exceeding "dead time" of the receive system of the spectrometer;
3. Possibility of saturating the sample, which enables the measurement of the spurious signals together with the NQR signals, then spurious signals only,
5 after which the latter can be subtracted.

Disadvantages:

1. Time available for accumulating the NQR signal is limited by the time constant $T_{1e} < T_1$;
2. The use of echo sequences (the possibility of which is one of the main
10 advantages of this group), does not help to detect a number of substances that have a little or zero asymmetry parameter, as the amplitude of echo-signals decreases with the decrease of the asymmetry parameter.

Group III

Advantages:

- 15 1. No intensity anomalies;
2. Possibility of saturating the sample to enable subtraction of spurious signals. Saturation in this case is entirely determined by the flip angle of the pulses and the time of spin-lattice relaxation T_1 ;
3. The stochastic resonance requires lower peak power. The peak power can be
20 tens and even hundreds times lower than when using coherent pulses and still achieve similar sensitivity.

Disadvantages:

1. Stochastic sequences belong to saturating sequences; however the saturation of the spin system limits the time of the NQR signal accumulation, as is the

case with Group II sequences, which is equivalent to a loss of sensitivity; it does not produce the advantages that Group II sequences can offer using echo signals.

2. Using a stochastic sequence for saturating a sample does not give any advantages as compared with normal saturation methods that use coherent pulses, but is technically more complicated to realise.
3. Using stochastic sequences requires introducing a random delay in the timing of the radio frequency pulses, but there are cases where the timing between radio frequency pulses is relatively short and any delays introduced in the timing tend to greatly increase the spectrometer time required to obtain the desired time average spectral data.

The general conclusion about the use of stochastic sequences in NQR for identification of explosive and narcotic substances is that they are more technically complicated to produce and the achieved sensitivity as a rule does not exceed that of coherent sequences.

Group IV

Advantages:

1. it is possible to receive a continuous chain of signals if the requirement $n \cdot \omega_{\text{eff}} \neq m \cdot \frac{\pi}{\tau}$ is met, which ensures unlimited time for signal accumulation.
Here, τ is the pulse spacing of the sequence, n and m are whole numbers, and ω_{eff} represents the effective field which substitutes the effect of the RF pulses and the resonance offset.
2. it is possible to receive an NQR signal phase that is different from the phase of irradiating pulses, which can be used for cancelling intensity anomalies, or for subtracting spurious signals;

3. Comparatively little RF power is required for detecting samples in large volumes.

Disadvantages:

1. Intensity anomalies;
- 5 2. Higher requirements due to the time of damping ringing and the time of equipment insensitivity at short T_2^* .

When the requirement $n \cdot \omega_{\text{off}} \neq m \cdot \frac{\pi}{\tau}$ is met, the SSFP sequences allow achievement of a greater signal-to-noise ratio per unit of time than any other multi-pulse sequences used for exciting the quadrupole spin system.

- 10 However, complying with this requirement cannot be guaranteed in practice because the exact value of the resonance offset in most cases is unknown due to the fact that the exact temperature of the sample is not known either.

Thus the dependence of the signal intensity on the resonance offset when using the SSFP sequences is characterised by the existence of intensity anomalies and
 15 these intensity anomalies make the SSFP group sensitive to the changes in the resonance frequency of the quadrupole spin system during temperature changes.

In the solid state when irradiating sequence parameters which approach the resonance conditions, intensity anomalies are manifested specifically by the narrowing of the amplitude and acceleration of damping of the signal as indicated

- 20 by the equation: $n \cdot \omega_{\text{off}} = m \cdot \frac{\pi}{\tau}$.,

If the temperature of a sample leads to the setting of such frequency ω_0 of the quadrupole transition in the sample such that the resonance condition

$n \cdot \omega_{\text{off}} = m \cdot \frac{\pi}{\tau}$ is met, then the chain of the NQR signals decays with time constant

T_{1e} , which is the function of the frequency offset, pulse interval and the flip angle.

At short T_1 times ($T_{1e} < T_1$) the decay happens quickly, decreasing sharply the sensitivity of detection, which can result in a sharp decline in the signal intensity or even in the complete loss of information about the presence (or absence) of the

5 sample in the examined volume..

For a number of substances temperature dependence of the resonance frequencies of quadrupolar nuclei is quite considerable. For example, for RDX at frequency $\nu_+ = 5.192$ MHz at temperatures close to room temperature, the change in ^{14}N resonance frequency is $-520 \text{ Hz}/^\circ\text{K}$, for PETN at the ^{14}N frequency
10 $\nu_+ = 890 \text{ kHz}$ it is $-160 \text{ Hz}/^\circ\text{K}$, for KNO_3 at nitrogen-14 line $\nu_+ = 567 \text{ kHz}$ it is $-140 \text{ Hz}/^\circ\text{K}$ etc.

The maximum sensitivity in most cases is achieved in practice when using SSFP sequences, which if the parameters are properly chosen permit achievement of the biggest signal to noise ratio in unit time.

15 The first SSFP sequence consisting of identical coherent RF pulses was used in NMR in 1951 and later studied in great detail. In NQR, this sequence was first used for measuring the T_1 of the ^{14}N resonance line in hexamethylene tetramine. Then a two-frequency version of this sequence was used to measure relaxation times in urea, which involved the simultaneous irradiation of the two ^{14}N
20 resonance transitions ν_+ and ν_- with two SSFP sequences.

Later, a sequence with identical coherent RF pulses and a nonzero resonance offset was used. Back then, some combinations of SSFP sequences were used to solve the problem of intensity anomalies in detecting explosives by the NQR method.

25 The following method of suppressing intensity anomalies was suggested.

To irradiate the sample, the basic version of the SSFP sequences was used – a sequence of coherent equally spaced pulses with a flip angle φ and the repetition cycle $\tau : [\tau/2 - \varphi - \tau/2]_n$, where n is the number of the sequence cycles (it is also possible to write it down as $[\varphi - \tau]_n$).

- 5 The irradiation was done with different series of pulses, with the carrier frequency of pulses in each series corresponding to one of the two values: f_0 and $f_0 \pm \frac{2}{\tau}$,

where f_0 is the frequency close to the resonance frequency.

If there was no signal when irradiating with the series that had the carrier frequency f_0 , the sample would then be irradiated with the other series with the

- 10 carrier frequency $f_0 \pm \frac{2}{\tau}$.

The difference in the frequency of both carrier frequencies corresponds to the difference between the frequencies at which the maximum and the minimum signal intensity was observed.

- It was then suggested to use combinations of sequences with phase alternating
15 (PAPS) and without phase alternating (NPAPS): $[\varphi_x - \tau - \varphi_x - \tau]_n [\varphi_x - \tau - \varphi_{-x} - \tau]_n$,

where the bottom index at the flip angle sign φ designates the phase of the carrier frequency for the RF pulse, and n is the number of cycles of the sequence.

- In this case, if in the intervals corresponding to PAPS, the maximum signal was
20 achieved, then in the intervals corresponding to NPAPS, the minimum signal would be observed. Such sequence combinations permitted irradiating the sample without switching the carrier frequency.

Essentially, two separate methods were proposed by which to perform the signal accumulation.

In the first method, the signals received after φ_x pulses of the NPAPS sequence and after φ_{-x} pulses of the PAPS sequence are subtracted, and those received
5 after φ_x of the PAPS sequence are added together. This allows not only a decrease in intensity anomalies, but also elimination of magneto-acoustic ringing.

In the second method, the signals received after φ_x pulses of both PAPS and NPAPS sequences are added up with the positive sign, and after φ_{-x} pulses they are added with the negative sign.

10 The maximum accumulated signal achieved by using either method of accumulation is less than the maximum achieved when using only NPAPS or PAPS by $\sqrt{2}$ times.

For the sake of comparison, as shown in FIG. 1, the curves corresponding to two dependencies of NQR signal on the frequency received for NaNO_2 are shown,
15 after irradiation with NPAPS and PAPS sequences using the accumulation rules determined by the first method described above (curve 1) and the second method (curve 2), respectively.

Thus all methods described above for eliminating temperature effects associated with intensity anomalies at a prescribed number of accumulations result in
20 decreasing the intensity of the measured signal, as compared with the maximum signal intensity possible to measure arising from using only one of the SSFP sequences.

Disclosure of the Invention

A principal object of the present invention is to increase the accuracy of detection
25 in specimens of prescribed substances such as, but not limited to, certain

explosives and narcotics compared with previously known methods of detecting same using NQR.

It is a preferred object of the invention to provide a multi-pulse sequence that reduces the effect of temperature and increases the NQR signal intensity in the
5 detection of NQR signals emitted from such specimens.

In accordance with the invention, the principal object is achieved by using a combination of two or more sequences, arranged so that a definite regularity of the phase alteration of pulses in each of the sequences is equivalent to a shift of spectral components of the sequences in relation to each other, and in at least
10 one of the sequences, not less than two phases are alternating

Preferably, at least one of the sequences contains a preparatory pulse.

Thus, according to one aspect of the invention, there is provided an apparatus for producing a multi-pulse sequence of the kind described for irradiating a substance provided with quadrupole nuclei with either integer or half-integer spins to detect
15 an NQR signal emitted therefrom, the apparatus having pulse sequence generating means to produce said multi-pulse sequence.

According to another aspect of the invention, there is provided a method detecting a class of explosive or narcotic substances containing quadrupolar nuclei in a sample using nuclear quadrupole resonance, including the following steps:

20 generating a combination of the steady state free precession pulse sequences, the pulse sequences consisting of pulses that contain phases of the carrier frequency chosen from a certain set of unmatched phases distributed within the interval from 0 to 2π radian, with every sequence different from the others either by the number of phases chosen from the set, or by the sequence order inside the
25 sequence; and

irradiating the sample with said combination of the pulse sequences.

Preferably, the method includes detecting nuclear quadrupole resonance signals when the combination of the pulse sequences irradiates the sample; and

combining all said nuclear quadrupole resonance signals to generate the resulting signal.

- 5 Preferably, the predetermined frequency of the pulse sequence is near to one of the NQR frequencies of the substances to be detected.

Alternatively, it is preferred to mitigate the effect of temperature by using a combination of two or more sequences different from a combination of PAPS and NPAPS, arranged so that a definite regularity of the phase alteration of pulses in
10 each of the sequences is equivalent to a shift of spectral components of the sequences in relation to each other, and in at least one of the sequences not less than two phases are alternating and none of the sequences contains a preparatory pulse.

- According to a preferred arrangement of this alternative of the invention, there is
15 provided a method of detecting a class of explosive or narcotic substances containing quadrupolar nuclei in a sample using nuclear quadrupole resonance, including the following steps:

- generating a combination of the steady state free precession pulse sequences without a preparatory pulse, using a combination of two or more sequences
20 different from a combination of PAPS and NPAPS, the pulse sequences consisting of pulses that contain phases of the carrier frequency chosen from a certain set of unmatched phases distributed within the interval from 0 to 2π radian, with every sequence different from the others either by the number of phases chosen from the set, or by the sequence order inside the sequence; and
25 irradiating the sample with the combination of the pulse sequences.

Preferably, the method includes detecting nuclear quadrupole resonance signals when the combination of the pulse sequences irradiates the sample; and

combining all said nuclear quadrupole resonance signals to generate the resulting signal.

In accordance with a further aspect of the invention, the principal object of the invention is achieved by completing one measurement act using a combination
5 that consists of at least two multi-pulse sequences having the same carrier frequency of the RF pulses, but different phase shifts between pulses in each sequence of the said combination.

This results in all the sequences of the combination having a different effective carrier frequency, and, consequently, the NQR signals obtained after each of the
10 sequences having a different dependence on the frequency offset. If the NQR signals from different sequences are combined, then the resulting intensity of the signal has a significantly reduced dependence on the frequency offset and, consequently, the effect of temperature.

In a preferred aspect of the invention, it is important also to consider that any spin
15 system has a non-zero "phase memory" time. The phenomenon of "phase memory" manifests itself in the fact that a sudden momentary perturbation of the spin system influences its evolution for a certain period of time. This phenomenon can be used to change the dependence of the NQR signal on the frequency offset to reduce the effect of temperature. For this purpose preparatory pulses (or
20 groups of preparatory pulses) may be used that are switched on before one or several sequences of the combination.

Brief Description of the Drawings

The invention will be better understood in the light of the following description of two preferred embodiments thereof. The description is made with reference to the
25 accompanying drawings, wherein:

FIG.1 is a graph representing curves corresponding to two dependencies of the intensity of NQR signals plotted against the resonance frequency offset in kHz, whereby the NQR signals are measured at the resonance frequency of NaNO_2 ,

which is at the line $\nu_- = 3.603$ MHz. During the NPAPS and PAPS sequences, the rules of addition are determined by the first method (curve 1) and the second method (curve 2) respectively, as described in the aforementioned discussion of background art;

- 5 FIG.2 is a graph similar to Fig 1, but demonstrating examples of the effect of preparatory pulses on the value of the NQR signal in accordance with the first embodiment, where the preparatory pulses are switched on before the PAPS sequence:

$$\varphi_{0\phi} - \tau - (\varphi_x - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(+x)} - \varphi_{-x} - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(-x)})_n;$$

- 10 FIG.3 is another graph, similar to Figs 1 and 2, but showing an example of using PAPS and NPAPS sequences in accordance with the first embodiment with preparatory pulses at the frequency ν_- for NaNO_2 , wherein:

Curve 1 corresponds to PAPS and NPAPS sequences with preparatory pulses:

$$\varphi_{0x} - \tau - (\varphi_x - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(+x)} - \varphi_{-x} - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(-x)})_n, \text{ and } \varphi_{0y} - \tau - (\varphi_x - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(+x)})_{2n};$$

- 15 and curve 2 is the result of an experiment with these sequences with the same number of accumulations but without preparatory pulses, corresponding to the second method described in relation to the background art;

FIG.4 is a graph similar to those of the preceding figures, but showing the result of using four sequences of the type for powdered RDX at the transition frequency

- 20 $\nu_- = 3.410$ MHz also in accordance with the first embodiment, the sequences being:

$$\varphi_{0y} - \tau - (\varphi_x - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(+x)})_{4m};$$

$$\varphi_{0x} - \tau - (\varphi_x - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(+x)} - \varphi_{-x} - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(-x)})_{2m};$$

$$(\varphi_x - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(+x)} - \varphi_y - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(+y)} - \varphi_{-x} - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(-x)} - \varphi_{-y} - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(-y)})_m;$$

$$(\varphi_x - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(+x)} - \varphi_{-y} - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(-y)} - \varphi_{-x} - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(-x)} - \varphi_y - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(+y)})_m; \text{ and}$$

FIG.5 is a graph similar to those of the preceding figures, but showing two
 5 examples of using a combination of sequences without preparatory pulses in
 accordance with the second embodiment, the sequences being:

$$(\varphi_x - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}} - \varphi_y - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}} - \varphi_{-x} - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}} - \varphi_{-y} - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}})_m, \text{ and}$$

$$(\varphi_x - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}} - \varphi_{-y} - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}} - \varphi_{-x} - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}} - \varphi_y - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}})_m;$$

wherein the experiments were carried out using RDX at the frequency line
 10 $\nu_- = 3.410 \text{ MHz}$.

Best Mode(s) for Carrying Out the Invention

The best mode for carrying out the invention is concerned with using multi-pulse
 RF sequences to excite an NQR signal in a substance containing quadrupole
 nuclei with either integer or half-integer spins for the purposes of detecting such a
 15 signal.

The particular apparatus for producing pulse sequences of this kind comprises a
 pulse generator, the hardware design of which is known, and described in the
 applicant's corresponding International Patent Application PCT/AU00/01214 (WO
 01/25809), which is incorporated herein by reference.

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- 16 -

In order to generate a pulse sequence, firstly a pulse programmer is used to create a low voltage level pulse sequence. Such programmer is capable of generating a continuous sine wave of a desired frequency (eg; 0.89 or 5.2MHz) and of any phase by using a Direct Digital Synthesizer (DDS) or any RF source.

- 5 To create a pulse sequence, a gate is used to divide the continuous sine wave into small pulses. For example, the gate switches on for $\sim 300\mu\text{s}$ and off for $\sim 300\mu\text{s}$, repeatedly thereby creating a sequence of pulses. The user of the pulse generator generates the pulse sequence via a computer program in the controlling computer. The computer program enables the user to input the frequency, phase, 10 duration and separation of any pulses and allows the user to repeat any parts of the pulse sequence in a loop. The entire pulse sequence is contained in the program and then converted into binary and sent to the pulse programmer and stored in memory. The CPU of the pulse programmer then takes the machine code stored in memory and creates the pulse sequence by changing the 15 frequency and phase of the DDS and providing instructions to the gate as to when to switch, thereby creating the pulses.

A simplified example of the program used to create a pulse sequence is outlined below:

20

Set Transmit Frequency: 0.89MHz

Set Phase: 0 degrees

Gate Open

Wait $300\mu\text{s}$

- 25 Gate Closed (thus first pulse is created $300\mu\text{s}$ long of phase 0 degrees)

Wait $300\mu\text{s}$

Set Transmit Frequency: 0.89MHz

Set Phase: 90 degrees

- 30 For 1000 loops

Gate Open

Wait $300\mu\text{s}$

Gate Closed

- 17 -

Wait 300 μ s
End of Loop

(thus 1000 additional pulses are created each 300 μ s long and spaced 300 μ s of a
5 phase 90 degrees).

Secondly, each pulse sequence is transmitted to the coil via a high power
amplifier (1 \rightarrow 5kW), which amplifies the low voltage signal created by the pulse
programmer to a higher voltage level which is sufficient to stimulate the nitrogen
10 ¹⁴ nuclei.

Pursuant to the invention, temperature effects on the ability to detect and measure
the NQR signal may be reduced by using multiple pulse sequences in which "the
bodies of sequences" contain RF pulses with various sets of the carrier frequency
phases.

15 Accordingly, the best mode for carrying out the invention involves producing a
combination of two or more pulse sequences, arranged so that a definite
regularity of the phase alteration of RF pulses in each of the pulse sequences
occurs, which is equivalent to a shift of the spectral components of the pulse
sequences in relation to each other, and further, in at least one of the pulse
20 sequences, there are not less than two phases alternating.

For the purposes of considering the aforementioned pulse sequence analytically,
it should be noted that as the effective carrier frequency of the sequence does not
depend on the absolute value of the RF pulses' phase, but only on the difference
between phases of adjacent pulses divided by the time interval between these
25 pulses, all phases are calculated from the phase of the first pulse of the body of
the sequence, which, irrespective of its actual value, will always be considered to
be zero.

To explain this further, a group consisting of N ($N \geq 2$) different phases, containing all the phases of one combination of multi-pulse sequences has the following phases:

$$\phi_1, \phi_2, \dots, \phi_i, \dots, \phi_N. \quad (1)$$

- 5 All phases ϕ_i , $i=1 \dots N$ are within the interval from 0 to 2π radian, $\phi_i \neq \phi_j$ if $i \neq j$ and $\phi_1 = 0$.

In accordance with the invention, the body of each pulse sequence must contain pulse cycles (at least one), with the pulses of each cycle containing one of the following $N!$ sets of the carrier frequency phases:

- 10 one set of phases being of the type: $\phi_{1_1}, \phi_{1_2}, \dots, \phi_{1_i}, \dots, \phi_{1_N}$;

N sets of phases being of the type: $\phi_{2_1}, \phi_{2_2}, \dots, \phi_{2_i}, \dots, \phi_{2_{N-1}}$;

:
:
:

$\frac{N!}{(N-i)!i!}$ sets of phases being of the type: $\phi_{i_1}, \phi_{i_2}, \dots, \phi_{i_i}, \dots, \phi_{i_{N-i}}$;

:
:
:

- 15 N sets of phases being of the type: ϕ_{N_1} .

Here each phase ϕ_{i_k} ($i, k = 1, \dots, N$) is one of a set of phases (1), with $\phi_{i_k} \neq \phi_{i_m}$, if $k \neq m$. The set ϕ_{1_k} is equivalent to the set ϕ_k .

If the bodies of all sequences used in one detection process for a sample contain the same set of phases, they must differ from each other by at least the order of alternation of the pulse phases.

One embodiment of the best mode for carrying out the present invention is
5 concerned with improving the detection of substances having a relaxation time T_1 comparable with the time of the duration of the pulse sequence.

In this embodiment, a preparatory pulse is used in an SSFP sequence to improve the value of the NQR signal. To explain the influence of a preparatory pulse included in an SSFP sequence, the characteristics of this type of sequence will
10 now be considered in detail.

The development of the spin system of a substance containing quadrupole nuclei with either integer and half-integer spins from the moment that multi-pulse irradiation of a specimen of the substance starts, undergoes three main stages:

- (1) transient processes;
- 15 (2) quasi-stationary state;
- (3) stationary state.

As a rule, transient processes decay at times $t \leq 3T_2$, and are replaced by a quasi-stationary state.

One of the characteristics of the quasi-stationary state as compared with the
20 stationary state proper, which replaces it at times $\leq 3T_{1\rho}$ ($T_{1\rho}$ is the time of spin-lattice relaxation in the rotating frame), is the presence of the "phase memory" which manifests itself by the spin-system "remembering" the effect of a preparatory pulse. After the time $3T_{1\rho}$ the spin-system completely adopts the

- 20 -

stationary state and on meeting the condition of $n \cdot \omega_{\text{eff}} \neq m \cdot \frac{\pi}{\tau}$ a different from zero NQR signal exists as long as it is needed.

The fact that the "phase memory" of the spin system is limited by the time interval being $\leq 3T_{1\rho}$, means that a "group of preparatory pulses" may be provided, as well

5 as a single preparatory pulse.

The first specific embodiment of the best mode for carrying out the present invention involves producing the multi-pulse sequence of the best mode in an SSFP type sequence, including a "preparatory pulse" or a "group of preparatory pulses" in at least one of the pulse sequences and the use of the quasi-stationary
10 state in the pulse sequence to "remember" the effect of the preparatory pulse. The preparatory pulse increases the intensity of the NQR signal and at the same time reduces the temperature effects in the detection of a prescribed substance containing quadrupole nuclei in a specimen of such.

FIG.2 shows examples of the influence of preparatory pulses, used prior to the
15 PAPS sequence $\varphi_0 - \tau - (\varphi_x - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(+x)} - \varphi_{-x} - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(-x)})_n$, upon the value of the NQR signal detected in experiments carried out on a sample of NaNO_2 on line ν_- . In all cases the experiments were carried out at room temperature.

The duration of the multi-pulse sequence in these examples is less than the spin-lattice relaxation time T_1 . Here φ_0 is the flip angle of the preparatory pulse; φ is
20 the flip angle of the pulses of the sequence body; ϕ is the phase of the preparatory pulse; t_{delay} is the time of the delay exceeding the "dead time" of the receiver system; $T_{\text{acq}(\theta)}$ is acquisition time; θ is the receiver phase.

Curve 1 was received at $\varphi_0 = \pi/2$ and $\phi = +x$, curve 2 was received without the preparatory pulse, and curve 3 was received at $\varphi_0 = \pi/2$ and $\phi = +y$.

25 Figures 3 and 4 show two examples of the use of the first embodiment.

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In both examples the magnetic field component B_1 of the RF pulses was 4.5 Gauss. The duration of the 90° pulse in the powder sample was $68 \mu\text{s}$. Experiments were conducted on NaNO_2 at the frequency $\nu = 3.603 \text{ MHz}$ at room temperature. The spin-lattice relaxation time for this line was $T_1 = 280 \text{ ms}$.

- 5 Figure 3 shows an example of using PAPS and NPAPS sequences with spin-lattice relaxation preparatory pulses. Curve 1 corresponds to the PAPS and NPAPS sequences with spin-lattice relaxation preparatory pulses, and curve 2 shows experimental results for the same sequences with the same number of accumulations but without the spin-lattice relaxation preparatory pulses (as in the
10 second method described previously with respect to the background art).

The duration of each sequence was less than 170 ms, and the interval between the sequences was 2 s.

The parameters of the sequences NPAPS $\varphi_{0y} - \tau - (\varphi_x - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(+x)})_{2n}$ and PAPS $\varphi_{0x} - \tau - (\varphi_x - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(+x)} - \varphi_{-x} - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(-x)})_n$ are as follows:

- 15 $\varphi_0 = \varphi = 90^\circ$; pulse duration $t_w = 68 \mu\text{s}$; $\tau = 778 \mu\text{s}$; $t_{\text{delay}} = 600 \mu\text{s}$; $T_{\text{acq}(\theta)} = 1024 \mu\text{s}$; $n = 80$.

Now adopting the designations: $T = t_w + t_{\text{delay}} + T_{\text{acq}(\theta)}$; and where f_0 is the carrier frequency of the RF pulses, then the effective carrier frequencies f_{eff} for both sequences would be

- 20 $f_{\text{eff}} = f_0$ for NPAPS sequence;

$$f_{\text{eff}} = f_0 + \frac{1}{2T} \text{ for PAPS sequence.}$$

As can be seen from FIG.3, the use of spin-lattice relaxation preparatory pulses does not allow an increase in the intensity of the NQR signal at the minimum

points, but beyond the narrow areas, near the minimum, the signal intensity is considerably increased.

FIG.4 shows the result of using four sequences for detecting powdered RDX, the sequences being of the following type:

$$5 \quad \varphi_{0y} - \tau - (\varphi_x - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(+x)})_{4m}; \quad (2)$$

$$\varphi_{0x} - \tau - (\varphi_x - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(+x)} - \varphi_{-x} - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(-x)})_{2m}; \quad (3)$$

$$(\varphi_x - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(+x)} - \varphi_y - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(+y)} - \varphi_{-x} - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(-x)} - \varphi_{-y} - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(-y)})_m; \quad (4)$$

$$(\varphi_x - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(+x)} - \varphi_{-y} - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(-y)} - \varphi_{-x} - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(-x)} - \varphi_y - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(+y)})_m. \quad (5)$$

For all the four sequences $m = 50$, the duration of delays, pulses and acquisition times coincides completely with the previous example. The intervals between sequences are also 2 s.

The effective carrier frequencies are as follows:

$$f_{\text{eff}} = f_0 \text{ for sequence (2);}$$

$$f_{\text{eff}} = f_0 + \frac{1}{2T} \text{ for sequence (3);}$$

$$15 \quad f_{\text{eff}} = f_0 + \frac{1}{4T} \text{ for sequence (4);}$$

$$f_{\text{eff}} = f_0 + \frac{3}{4T} \text{ for sequence (5).}$$

Comparing figures 3 and 4, it becomes obvious that intensity variations in the latter case are much weaker.

The second embodiment for carrying out the invention achieves a reduction in temperature effects by using a combination of two or more sequences other than PAPS and NPAPS, arranged so that a definite regularity of phase alternation of RF pulses in each of the sequences is equivalent to a shift of the spectrum components of the sequences in relation to each other. At least one of the sequences contains not less than two alternating phases and no sequences are arranged so that a definite regularity of the phase alteration of RF pulses in each of the sequences is equivalent to a shift of spectral components of the sequences in relation to each other. Further, in at least one of the sequences, there are not less than two phases that are alternating and none of the sequences contains a spin-lattice relaxation preparatory pulse or group of spin-lattice relaxation preparatory pulses.

This embodiment is intended for detecting substances with a relaxation time T_1 much shorter than the duration of the pulse sequence T_{seq} .

In the case when $T_1 \ll T_{seq}$, the time of "phase memory" is so short that using preparatory pulses will not necessarily produce an increase of the signal intensity, and the preparatory pulse can be omitted.

For reducing temperature effects the sequences must contain pulses with various sets of the carrier frequency phases.

As before, the phase of the first pulse of each sequence is taken to be zero irrespective of its actual value. The phases of all pulses of each sequence will be determined in relation to the phase of the first pulse of this sequence.

When using a set of N ($N \geq 2$) different phases

$$\phi_1, \phi_2, \dots, \phi_i, \dots, \phi_N, \quad (6)$$

so that all phases are within the interval from 0 to 2π radian, $\phi_i \neq \phi_j$ if $i \neq j$, and $\phi_1 = 0$, the body of each pulse sequence must contain cycles of pulses (at least

one), with the pulses of each cycle containing one of the following $N!$ sets of carrier frequency phases:

one set of phases of the following type: $\phi_1^1, \phi_1^2, \dots, \phi_1^i, \dots, \phi_1^N$;

N sets of phases of the following type: $\phi_2, \phi_2, \dots \phi_2, \dots \phi_{2_{N-1}}$;

5 : :

 : :

$$\frac{N!}{(N-i)!i!} \text{ sets of phases of the following type: } \phi_{i_1}, \phi_{i_2}, \dots, \phi_{i_1}, \dots, \phi_{i_{N-i}};$$

N sets of phases of the following type: $\phi\mathbb{N}_i$.

Here each phase ϕ_{i_k} ($i, k = 1, \dots, N$) is one of the phases of set (6), with $\phi_{i_k} \neq \phi_{i_m}$,

10 if $k \neq m$. Set ϕ_1 is equivalent to set ϕ_k .

If sequences from one combination used in one detection process contain the same pulse phase set, they must differ by at least the sequence order of the phase alternation.

Two examples of the use of the second embodiment are shown in FIG.5.

15 Both examples present the use of a combination of sequences without preparatory pulses for powdered RDX.

$$(\varphi_x - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{sq}} - \varphi_y - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{sq}} - \varphi_x - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{sq}} - \varphi_y - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{sq}})_m \quad \text{and}$$

$$(\varphi_x - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}} - \varphi_y - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}} - \varphi_x - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}} - \varphi_y - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}})_m.$$

Experiments were performed at the transition frequency $\nu_- = 3.410$ MHz at room temperature.

As in previous examples, the magnetic field component B_1 of the RF pulses equalled 4.5 Gauss. The spin-lattice relaxation time for this line was $T_1 = 11$ ms.

- 5 The difference between the two experiments shown in curves 1 and 2 in FIG.5 consists only in the difference in the receive system phase.

Keeping in mind the phases of the receiver, the sequences corresponding to curve 1 can be presented as follows:

$$(\varphi_x - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(+x)} - \varphi_y - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(+y)} - \varphi_{-x} - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(-x)} - \varphi_{-y} - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(-y)})_m; \quad (7)$$

$$10 (\varphi_x - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(+x)} - \varphi_{-y} - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(-y)} - \varphi_{-x} - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(-x)} - \varphi_y - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(y)})_m. \quad (8)$$

Curve 2 corresponds to the combination of the same sequences but in the second sequence the phase of the receiver is changed to the opposite:

$$(\varphi_x - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(+x)} - \varphi_y - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(+y)} - \varphi_{-x} - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(-x)} - \varphi_{-y} - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(-y)})_m; \quad (9)$$

$$(\varphi_x - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(-x)} - \varphi_{-y} - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(+y)} - \varphi_{-x} - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(+x)} - \varphi_y - t_{\text{delay}} - T_{\text{acq}(-y)})_m. \quad (10)$$

- 15 For all the four sequences: $m = 50$, $\varphi = \pi/2$; the pulse duration $t_p = 68 \mu\text{s}$; the delay after the pulse $t_{\text{delay}} = 440 \mu\text{s}$; and the acquisition time $T_{\text{acq}(\theta)} = 1024 \mu\text{s}$. The interval between sequences is two seconds.

The effective carrier frequencies equal:

$$f_{\text{eff}} = f_0 + \frac{1}{4T}, \text{ for sequences (7), (9); and}$$

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$$f_{\sigma} = f_0 + \frac{3}{4T}, \text{ for sequences (8), (10).}$$

As a result of comparing curves 1 and 2, it is obvious that both combinations (7)-(8) and (9)-(10) show practically identical results with regards to reducing temperature effects, the only difference being an insignificant shift along the
5 frequency axis.

It should be appreciated that the scope of the present invention is not limited to the specific embodiments described herein.

The Claims Defining the Invention are as Follows

1. An apparatus for producing a multi-pulse sequence for irradiating a substance provided with quadrupole nuclei with either integer or half-integer spins to detect an NQR signal emitted therefrom, the apparatus having pulse
5 sequence generating means adapted to produce a combination of two or more pulse sequences, arranged so that a definite regularity of the phase alteration of pulses in each of the pulse sequences occurs that is equivalent to a shift of spectral components of the pulse sequences in relation to each other, and that in at least one of the pulse sequences, there are not less than two phases
10 alternating.
2. An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein at least one of the pulse sequences contains a preparatory pulse.
3. An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the combination of two or more pulse sequences is different from a combination of PAPS and NPAPS, and
15 none of the pulse sequences contains a preparatory pulse.
4. A method for detecting a class of substance containing quadrupole nuclei in a sample using nuclear quadrupole resonance, including the following steps:

generating a combination of the steady state free precession pulse sequences, the pulse sequences consisting of pulses that contain phases of
20 the carrier frequency chosen from a certain set of unmatched phases distributed within the interval from 0 to 2π radian, with every sequence different from the others either by the number of phases chosen from the set, or by the sequence order inside the sequence; and

irradiating the sample with said combination of the pulse sequences.
- 25 5. A method as claimed in claim 4, including generating the SSFP pulse sequences with a preparatory pulse

6. A method as claimed in claim 5, including switching on said preparatory pulse before one or several of the pulse sequences of the combination.

7. A method as claimed in any one of claims 4 to 6, including detecting nuclear quadrupole resonance signals when the combination of the pulse sequences
5 irradiates the sample; and

combining all said nuclear quadrupole resonance signals to generate the resulting signal.

8. A method as claimed in any one of claims 4 to 7, wherein the predetermined frequency of the pulse sequence is near to one of the NQR frequencies of the
10 substances to be detected.

9. A method as claimed in claim 4, including generating the combination of the steady state free precession pulse sequences without a preparatory pulse, using a combination of two or more sequences different from a combination of PAPS and NPAPS.

15 10. A method for detecting a class of substance containing quadrupole nuclei in a sample using nuclear quadrupole resonance, including completing one measurement act using a combination that consists of at least two multi-pulse sequences having the same carrier frequency of the pulses, but different phase shifts between the pulses, in each sequence of the combination.

20 11. A multi-pulse sequence for irradiating a substance provided with quadrupole nuclei with either integer or half-integer spins to detect an NQR signal emitted therefrom, comprising a combination of two or more pulse sequences, arranged so that a definite regularity of the phase alteration of pulses in each of the pulse sequences is equivalent to a shift of spectral components of the
25 pulse sequences in relation to each other, and in at least one of the pulse sequences, not less than two phases are alternating.

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12. A multi-pulse sequence as claimed in claim 11, wherein at least one of the pulse sequences contains a preparatory pulse.

13. A multi-pulse sequence as claimed in claim 11, wherein the combination of two or more pulse sequences is different from a combination of PAPS and NPAPS, and none of the pulse sequences contains a preparatory pulse.

14. An apparatus for producing a multi-pulse sequence substantially as herein described in any one of the embodiments with reference to the drawings as appropriate.

15. A method for detecting a class of substance containing quadrupole nuclei in a sample using nuclear quadrupole resonance substantially as herein described in any one of the embodiments with reference to the drawings as appropriate.

16. A multi-pulse sequence for irradiating a substance substantially as herein described in any one of the embodiments with reference to the drawings as appropriate.

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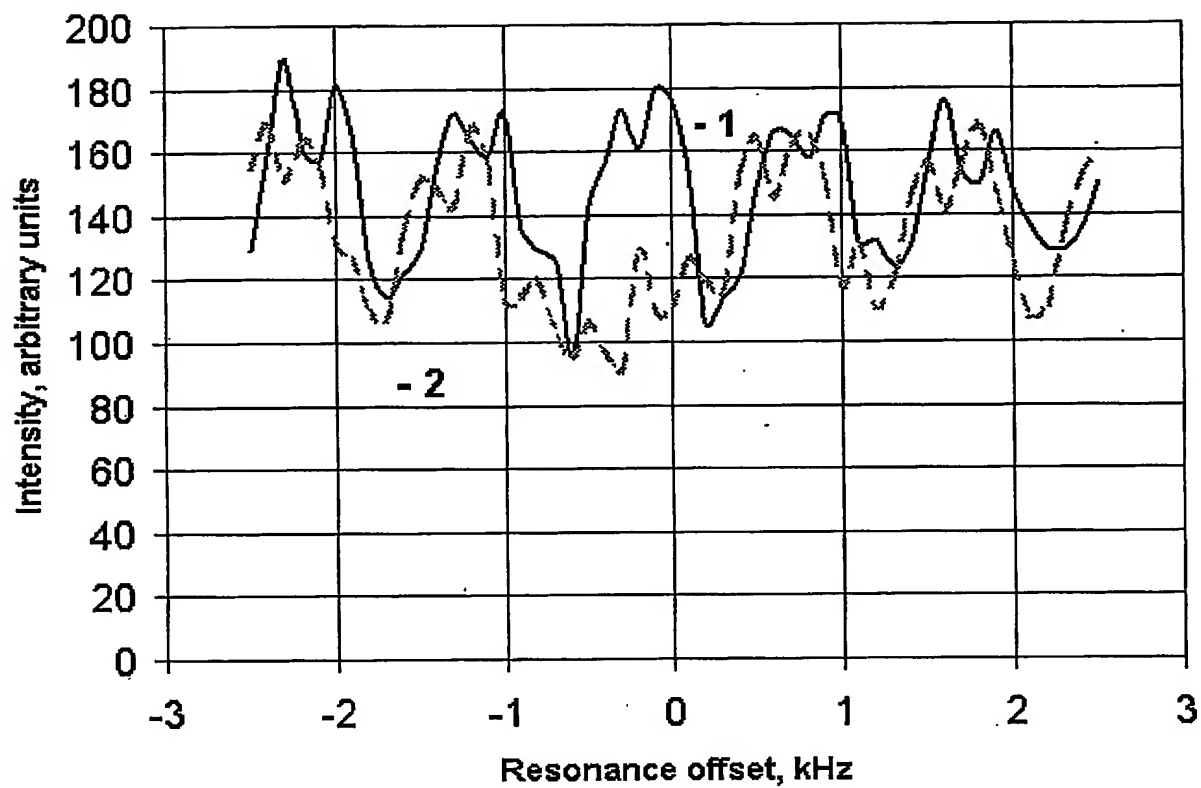


Fig. 1

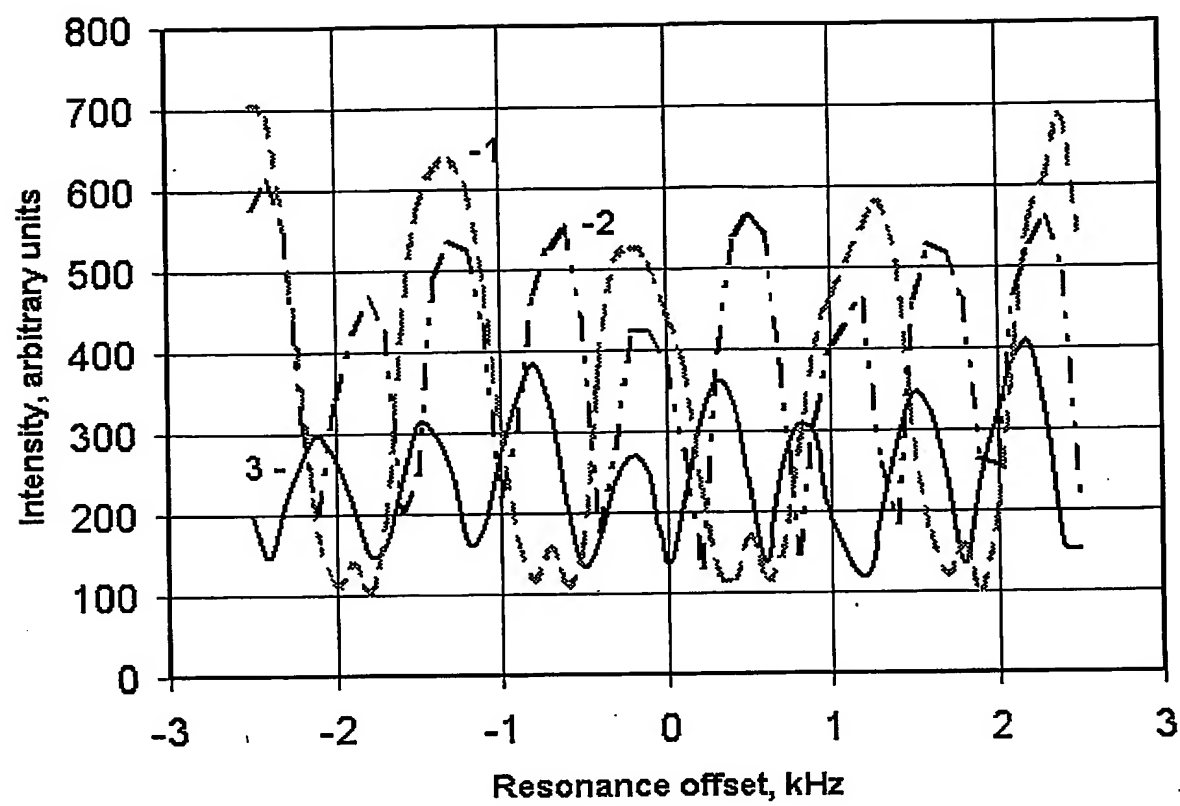


Fig. 2

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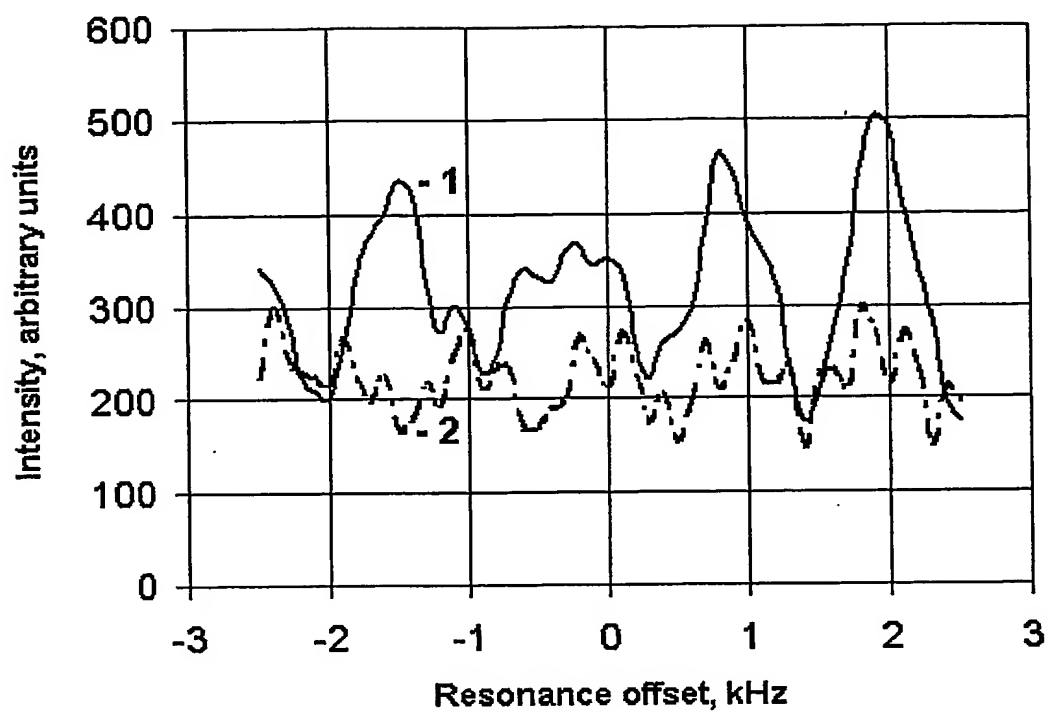


Fig. 3

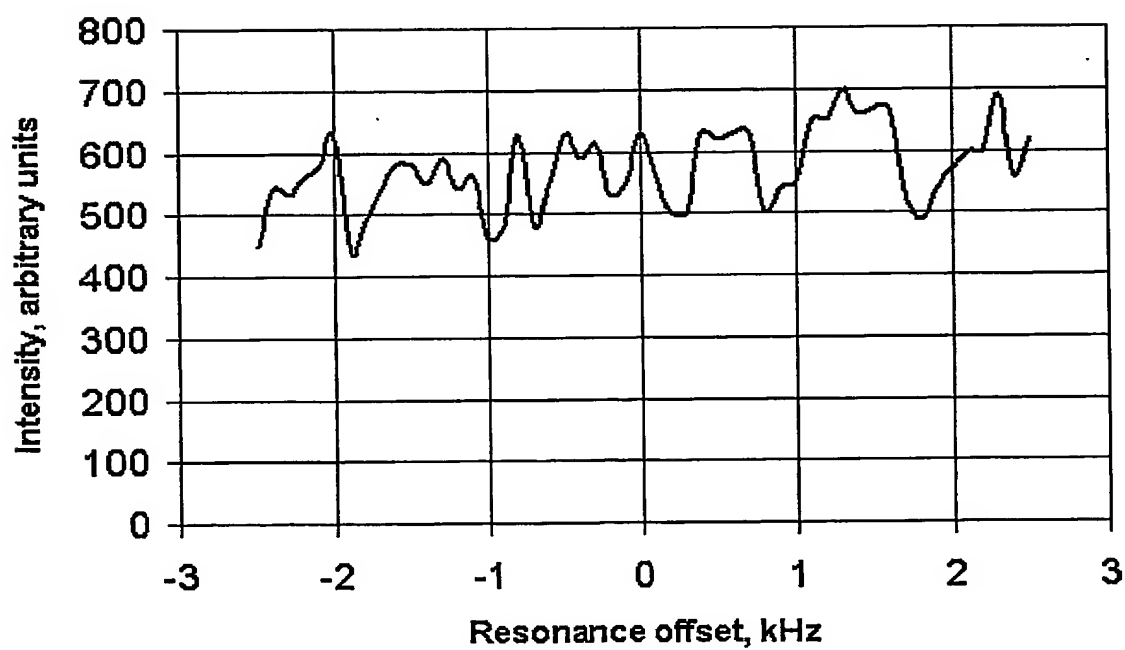


Fig. 4

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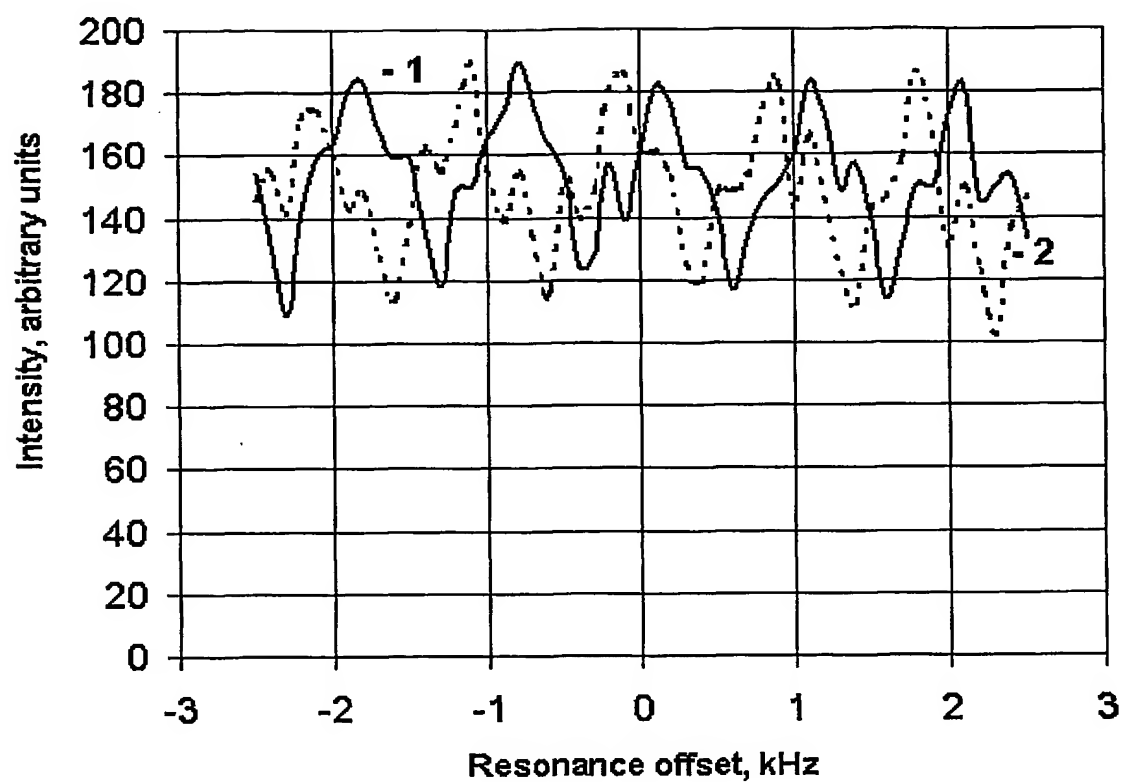


Fig. 5

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/AU03/00777

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER		
Int. Cl. ⁷ : G01V 3/14, G01R 33/54		
According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC		
B. FIELDS SEARCHED		
Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)		
Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched		
Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used) WPAT, USPTO, ESP@CE and Keywords (NQR and Nuclear Quadrupole Resonance)		
C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	WO 96/26453 A2 (BRITISH TECHNOLOGY GROUP LIMITED) 29 August 1996 See page 4 line 20 - page 5 line 21, page 6 line 24 - page 7 line 15, Page 8 line 26 - page 9 line 23, page 16 line 28 - page 18 line 5, Page 25 line 8 - page 27 line 12, page 33 line 31 - page 34 line 15 and Page 36 line 25 - page 37 line 33	1, 2, 4 - 8, 10, 11, 12
A	US 5365171 A (BUSS et al.) 15 November 1994 See page Abstract, column 2 line 21 - line 36, column 3 line 64 - column 4 line 16, Column 7 line 41 - column 8 line 43 and claims	1 - 13
A	GB 2200462 A (NATIONAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION) 3 August 1988 See Abstract, page 3 line 10 - line 30, page 4 line 25 - line 34 and page 5 line 21 - page 6 line 33	1 - 13
<input type="checkbox"/> Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> See patent family annex		
<p>* Special categories of cited documents:</p> <p>"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance</p> <p>"E" earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date</p> <p>"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)</p> <p>"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means</p> <p>"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed</p> <p>"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention</p> <p>"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone</p> <p>"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art</p> <p>"&" document member of the same patent family</p>		
Date of the actual completion of the international search 25 July 2003		Date of mailing of the international search report - 4 AUG 2003
Name and mailing address of the ISA/AU AUSTRALIAN PATENT OFFICE PO BOX 200, WODEN ACT 2606, AUSTRALIA E-mail address: pct@ipaustalia.gov.au Facsimile No. (02) 6285 3929		Authorized officer R.W.J. FINZI Telephone No : (02) 6283 2213

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International application No.

PCT/AU03/00777

This Annex lists the known "A" publication level patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned international search report. The Australian Patent Office is in no way liable for these particulars which are merely given for the purpose of information.

Patent Document Cited in Search Report				Patent Family Member			
WO	9626453	AU	48363/96	CA	2213568	EP	871895
		FI	973453	IL	117259	US	6208136
US	5365171	CA	2150459	EP	671014	EP	1132752
		WO	9412891				
GB	2200462	EP	277745	IL	85173	JP	63259449
		US	4887034				
END OF ANNEX							